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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 8308
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 5007
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 4248
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0371
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2159
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000383

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND ASEAN SECGEN DISCUSS ASEAN,
APPROACHES TO CHANGE IN BURMA

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador called on ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan on February 4 and discussed the ASEAN charter and Burma. Surin was confident that ASEAN member states, except for possibly the Philippines, would ratify the ASEAN charter this year. Surin expressed hope that Secretary Rice would attend this year's ARF meeting in Singapore, as a demonstration of USG commitment to the region. Surin said all problems in Asia must be solved regionally; as such, ASEAN should play the lead role in trying to resolve the situation in Burma. The U.S., China, India, and other countries would be key in assisting ASEAN if a multilateral approach to Burma were to succeed, Surin explained. End Summary.

ASEAN CHARTER

12. (C) The Ambassador February 4 called on ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan and opened the meeting by

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expressing his hope for greater U.S.-ASEAN cooperation. Turning to the ASEAN charter, the Ambassador asked Surin for his opinion on prospects for ratification of the ASEAN charter after Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's recent statements. Surin said Singaporean Foreign Minister George Yeo had proposed that ASEAN member states, minus the Philippines, ratify the charter and commemorate ratification in November on the fortieth anniversary of the Bangkok Declaration. Surin explained that the Philippines would go slow on ratification after Arroyo had reaffirmed that ratification would be difficult while Aung San Suu Kyi remained in detention. Ratification by other member states, however, was likely. Brunei was ready to ratify the charter and Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda had expressed confidence that Indonesia would ratify the charter.

13. (C) Turning to the meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum to be held in Singapore this July, Surin said Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had told him that he hoped that Secretary Rice would attend as a demonstration of U.S.

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commitment to the region. A demonstration such as this could encourage ASEAN member states to take a more proactive

approach to difficult issues such as Burma, Surin said.

ASEAN AS LEADER OF BURMA PROCESS

14. (C) Surin told the Ambassador that he agreed with Singaporean PM Lee's comments that Burma "is an albatross around our necks." Surin said he believed the United Nations process on Burma was stalled and the only way to bring about a solution was through a collaborative endeavor by ASEAN and interested parties. Indonesia and Thailand, among other ASEAN members, could play a positive, leading role in engaging the Burmese authorities. All problems in Asia are solved through regional actors, Surin said. For example, the U.S. has been a long-time regional actor in Northeast Asia and has played a key role in the North Korean nuclear issue. Other examples of regional success included Aceh, Mindanao, and Cambodia. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN must take a leading role with support from the U.S., China, India and others. Surin explained that a multi-party approach to Burma, similar to Six-Party Talks on North Korea, would hold the best prospects for success.

CHINA'S ROLE KEY IN SUPPORT OF ASEAN

15. (C) Surin said Indonesia and Thailand are best placed to take the lead on Burma because Singapore and Malaysia felt burnt by past efforts to take a proactive role on the Burma issue. The Chinese would be key, Surin explained; without the support of China all efforts to bring about change in Burma would fail. China has played an important role on the global stage in the Six-Party Talks, nevertheless the world community is expecting more from the Chinese in Darfur and Burma. The Ambassador agreed that the Chinese need to act soon, as Chinese prestige is at stake. The Chinese need to decide what side they want to be on, as the Burmese junta would not last. Surin suggested the U.S. focus efforts to

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engage the Chinese on Burma with the Communist Party of China, which has a more proactive, long-term view than the Chinese MFA.

16. (C) Surin told the Ambassador that the Chinese had approached him several times to ask for his assistance in persuading the U.S. to meet with Burmese authorities. The Chinese were quite serious in this desire, Surin explained.

17. (C) Referencing his meeting last week with Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, the Ambassador told Surin that, with a democratic government soon to be in place in Thailand, the RTG should take a leading role in calling for democratic change in Burma. Surin said the RTG planned to host a commemorative ASEAN meeting at the end of the year, and that would be an opportunity for Thailand to highlight the promotion of democracy and human rights.

COMMENT

18. (C) Surin was willing to engage on Burma, and could be a positive actor for change from within the ASEAN secretariat. While Surin's powers to compel ASEAN governments to take a more proactive approach on Burma are limited, he appears quite eager to take a constructive approach nonetheless, and for ASEAN to lead the effort.

JOHN